DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 055 PS 018 309

AUTHOR George, Carol; Solomon, Judith
TITLE Internal Working Models of Caregiving and Security of Attachment at Age Six.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the National Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Kansas City, MO, April 27-30, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attachment Behavior; Behavior Problems; *Child Caregivers; Cognitive Processes; *Helplessness; *Mothers; Parent Attitudes; Primary Education; *Security (Psychology); *Self Concept
IDENTIFIERS *Representational Modeling

ABSTRACT

A study concerning the mother's mental representation of herself as a caregiver focused on: (1) a conceptual framework developed for the purpose of describing and explaining internal working models of caregiving; and (2) efforts to define caregivers' representations of content and process that seem to be associated with attachment insecurity. Specific attention was given to the dimensions of control and disorganization in attachment. It was postulated that mothers would positively evaluate their willingness to respond to their children, their ability to read and understand their children's signals, and the effectiveness of their caregiving strategies. The mother would view her child as one who wants and deserves her care, who clearly signals what is needed, and who needs and will respond to her care. In a central relationship postulate, the mother would assert that she and her child are autonomous individuals in a relationship. The study collected data from 32 mothers and their kindergarten children by means of three home observations, a laboratory session, a caregiving interview, and 7-point helplessness and secure base scales. Results included findings that the mother's representations of herself as helpless and the child as beyond control are related to the child's control and disorganization. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED312055

Internal Working Models of Caregiving and Security of Attachment at Age Six

Carol George

Mills College

Judith Solomon

San Francisco State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Carol George

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 018309

Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Kansas City, MO, April 27-30. A portion of the data appear in Infant Mental Health, September, 1989.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Along with the other members of this symposium our research focuses on a critical but often neglected component of the attachment-caregiver relationship: the mother's mental representation of herself as a caregiver. Judith Solomon and I have been working on a systematic approach to caregiving representation. Today I will be discussing the framework we have developed for conceptualizing the caregiver's internal working model. I will also be presenting data that result from our initial attempts to apply this framework.

Our approach builds upon prior work in attachment theory and research--notably the work of Bowlby, Ainsworth, Main, and Bretherton. We find it useful to consider two fundamental aspects of the caregiver's representation: content and process. With regard to content, Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973) and Bretherton (1985) describe two interrelated components of internal working models of attachment. These consist of descriptions of the "self" and the "other," derived from experiences in the relationship and stored in the form of postulates about the self and other as individuals. Following Epstein (1980), we suggest that some postulates are framed also in terms of the relationship between self and other. With regard to process, the work of Main and her colleagues (1985) regarding adult attachment representations has illustrated the importance of information processing rules that govern the mother's ability to process thoughts and feelings relevant to the relationship. The information available to the mother will determine the postulates she uses and how well her caregiving model is adapted to the current situation.

Drawing on attachment theory and research, we began by defining the self, other, and relationship postulates we expected would be associated with attachment security. "Self" and "other" postulates were extrapolated primarily from studies of maternal behavior, most notably, Ainsworth's original study and our own study of mother-child interaction at age six. Mothers of secure children in these studies are described as sensitive and responsive. We would like to suggest that at the representational level, sensitivity implies three fundamental sets of self-other evaluations. With regard to the self, the mother must positively evaluate: (1) her willingness to respond, that is, "I am the kind of person who wants to care for this child,"; (2) her ability to read and understand the child's signals, that is, "I know what this child needs,"; and (3) whether her caregiving strategies will be effective, that is, "I am effective in filling the child's needs." We feel that the mother's sensitivity should also be reflected in complementary evaluations of the "other" as an individual who needs care. Thus, the corresponding child or "other" postulates should include the following statements: "This child wants and deserves my care and protection," "This child clearly signals what is needed," and "This child needs and will respond to my care." The "relationship" postulate was primarily based on the work of Main and her colleague's regarding adult

representations of attachment. This research shows that mothers of secure children are autonomous individuals who have a balanced, objective view of relationships. The central "relationship" postulate for security, therefore, should be "My child and I are autonomous individuals in this relationship."

Now that I have outlined our framework as it relates to attachment security, let me describe our study. Although we expect the postulates to apply to mothers' caregiving representations regardless of the age of their child, our research focuses on caregiving and attachment during middle childhood (Solomon, George, & Ivins, 1987). Our sample consisted of 32 mothers and their kindergarten children recruited from a middle-class suburb in the San Francisco Bay Area. Following a set of three home observations, mother-child dyads participated in a single laboratory session which was structured around Main and Cassidy's separation-reunion procedure for six-year-olds. Mothers were interviewed during the 90-minute separation and the subsequent reunion was used to assess the child's attachment security. Each reunion was classified and the child's interactive behavior was rated for security and avoidance according to the directions provided by Main and Cassidy. We developed interactive rating scales for ambivalence and control/ disorganization derived from classification information. The results I will discuss today are based on correlations with interactive behavior ratings. We have found those ratings to be more reliable than classification categories.

Our caregiving interview was adapted from the Parent Development Interview designed by Aber, Slade and their colleagues (1985). Mothers were asked to describe themselves as parents, to describe the affective aspects of their relationship, perceived similarities and differences with their children, and how they managed attachment-related and age-related issues, for example, the child beginning school. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and rated based on a consideration of the entire transcript.

To determine whether a correspondence could be found between the mother's mental representation of caregiving and the child's attachment security, we developed a 7-point global rating scale, entitled <u>secure base</u>. This scale reflects a synthesis of the caregiving postulates assessed on the basis of the mother's reported feelings, thoughts, and behavior regarding real and psychological threats to the child. In describing the scale I will give you a few examples from our transcripts. The highest ratings were given when the mother's thinking demonstrated evaluations of the self, other, and relationship which were consistent with our postulates for attachment security. That is, first, she viewed herself as someone who wanted to care for the child and viewed the child as wanting and deserving her care and protection. Second, the mother indicated that she was able to determine what the child needed and that the child clearly signaled those needs to her. One mother stated,

"he felt very angry (to miss his TV show). I think he felt like 'why did you have to pick this time (to run an errand). Why couldn't you do it at another time.'...he actually expressed that...I understood that it was important to him."

Third, the mother viewed herself as having effective strategies to meet the child's needs and viewed the child as needing and responding to her care. Finally, she described the relationship as an autonomous, goal-corrected partnership. As one mother described,

"He's so creative, (but) he doesn't pick up any of the...little bits and snipits... I don't want to be constantly yelling at him to be picking up his things. But I also don't want to be constantly picking up his things...I have to come to grips with the fact over and over that it's his house too."

Lower ratings on secure base were given when the mother's thinking demonstrated a negative evaluation of herself and the child with respect to the postulates. Some mothers described themselves as not willing or interested in caring for the child and the child as not wanting or deserving care. For example,

"...if (she) falls down and hurts (herself) in the midst (of misbehaving in public)...I'll just sit there and she'll cry and I say I have no sympathy for you what-so-ever. You caused this, not me."

Other mothers described themselves as confused and unable to determine what the child needed and the child as not clearly signaling her needs. One mother stated,

"I'm never quite sure what to do...because I can't tell whether she's being demanding ...or if she feels the need to control the situation. There are times that I get frustrated because I really don't know what's going on with her."

Other mothers who received low secure base ratings viewed themselves as ineffective in filling the child's needs and the child as either not needing or not responding to their efforts. Finally, lower ratings were given when the mother's description of her relationship with the child revealed that it was not an autonomous, goal-corrected partnership.

Secure base ratings were completed by two blind judges who were trained to be reliable using a development sample comprised of 8 randomly selected interviews and 5 pilots.

Note here (Table 1) the pattern of correlations between ratings of secure base and child interactive behavior. There was a strong significant positive correlation between maternal secure base and child security. Correlations for avoidance, ambivalence, and control/disorganization were all negative. These results show that, when taken together, our framework of self, other, and relationship postulates does

differentiate relative degrees of child security.

Most recently we have begun to consider the relation between the specific postulates and insecurity. Although I will only be presenting data relating to one aspect of insecurity, control/disorganization, I would like first to discuss briefly our view of how all the insecure patterns (avoidance, ambivalence, and control/disorganization) relate to our framework. As with the postulates related to attachment security, insecurity postulates for "self" and "other" are derived primarily from studies of maternal behavior and the "relationship" postulate is derived from the work of Main and her colleagues regarding adult mental representations of attachment. As shown here (Table 2), we expect each insecure group to be differentiated by one dimension of "self" and "other" postulates as well as a specific non-autonomous evaluation of the relationship. We suggest that caregiving representations associated with avoidance should be differentiated by "self" and "other" postulates on the dimension of willingness. These postulates might be worded as follows: "I am not the kind of person who wants to care for this child," and "This child does not want or deserve my care or protection." The "relationship" postulate associated with avoidance should reflect a view of the mother-child relationship as consisting of two detached individuals, that is, "Neither the child nor I must be in this relationship in order to be an individual." Caregiving representations associated with ambivalence should be differentiated by "self" and "other" postulates on the dimension of ability. These postulates might be worded, "I do not know what this child needs," and "This child does not clearly signal what is needed." The "relationship" postulate associated with ambivalence should reflect a view of the mother and child as enmeshed, that is "The child and I must be in this relationship in order to be individuals."

Control/disorganization is the least understood of all the attachment classifications and will be the focus of the remainder of today's discussion. We expect that caregiving representations associated with control/disorganization will be differentiated by "self" and "other" postulates on the dimension of effectiveness. This group of children was identified by Main and Solomon (1986, in press) at 12 months on the basis of disorganization of attachment behavior, and by Main and Cassidy (1988) at 6 years on the basis of the child's attempts to control the mother upon reunion with punitive or caregiving behavior. This pattern has been linked with the mother's experience of attachment-related trauma during her childhood. Little is known, however, about the etiology of control/disorganization and how it is related to maternal thinking. In our attempt to develop "self" and "other" postulates for control/disorganization we have focused on maternal helplessness, the mother's view of herself as ineffective and a view of the child as beyond control. There are three reasons for this focus. First, we believe that a child who is faced with a mother who becomes helpless in response to everyday childrearing experiences will develop strategies that enable the mother to be more

effective. Second, clinical studies show that experiences of trauma lead to perceptions of helplessness: the self as vulnerable and the world as out of control. Third, Main suggests that the experience of a parent who is frightened or frightening leads to disorganization of the infant's behavior. Consistent with her approach, we suggest that feeling helpless can lead a mother to act in a way that the child perceives as frightened or frightening.

At the level of relationships, Main has found that mothers of controlling/disorganized children have not resolved experiences of trauma or loss. Bowlby (1980) suggests that an individual must develop a new definition of the self in relation to others as the result of the grieving process. We propose, therefore, that mothers who have not resolved these experiences should have representations of the parent-child relationship which reflect a confusion of the identity of "self" and "other."

We developed a 7-point <u>helplessness</u> scale which encompasses the self and other postulates that we hypothesized were related to control/disorganization. The highest ratings were given when the mother acknowledged herself to be consistently lacking in effective and appropriate resources to deal with the child. For example, mothers stated repeatedly,

"I feel real helpless..."

or

"I am way over my head."

Mothers who received high ratings also described the child as unresponsive to their actions and beyond control. For example,

"(We were in a hurry to get into the house. She) ran into the house and locked every door and locked everyone out and then sat there at the door and laughed."

or

"She's very strong minded and doesn't take anything from anybody, including me...she's unlike a lot of children at her age... it's almost like she's 5 going on 10 in many ways."

Low helplessness ratings were given when the mother described herself as a person who possessed situation-appropriate and effective resources and described the child as being responsive to her strategies.

We have preliminary results (Table 3) regarding the relation between maternal helplessness and child interactive behavior. These preliminary results show that the mother's representation of herself as helpless and the child as beyond control indeed is related to the child's controlling/disorganized behavior. Helplessness was

negatively related to security and unrelated to either avoidance or ambivalence. These results suggest that the mother's view of herself as helpless with respect to the child is not a general characteristic of insecurity. Rather, it seems to be a unique feature of the mother's representation that is related to control/disorganization in children's reunion behavior.

I have time to comment on only three important questions raised by this study. First, does the mother's evaluations the caregiving postulates lead the child to develop attachment strategies in infancy, or, is the mother's evaluation of these postulates at age six the product of the child's earlier attachment behavior and their joint experiences in the relationship for the past 6 years? If we were to find that these caregiving postulates are not related to attachment behavior in infancy, this would imply that they are not fundamental or differentiating dimensions of internal working models of caregiving.

Second, this study does not answer questions regarding the integration of internal working models of relationships. On one level, we still do not understand the relation between internal working models of attachment and internal working models of caregiving. On another level, we also do not understand how the mother constructs her caregiving model. Does she construct a separate caregiving model for each child, or, does she construct a general model of herself as a caregiver?

Third, this study also raises a more general question regarding the nature of internal working models. What is the relation between information processing rules and caregiving postulates? We feel that postulates are the product of the rules the mother uses to process the feelings and experiences of being a caregiver. Our focus on postulates, without specifying the role of these rules, has led to a system which is easy to learn and makes it possible to use representational measures in a variety of research settings. At the same time we feel it is important to look further at the relation between the content and processing rules in the formation of the caregiver's internal working model.

I have discussed the conceptual framework that we have developed to describe and explain internal working models of caregiving. I have also discussed our most recent efforts to define caregiving representations that we feel are associated with attachment insecurity, specifically here control/disorganization. In closing, I would like to draw two general conclusions from our work to date. First, there is a strong correspondence between the mother's mental representation of herself as a caregiver and the child's internal working model of attachment, as measured by interactive reunion behavior. Second, based on these data, our postulate framework appears to be a promising way of assessing aspects of caregiving representations. We plan to clarify and extend this framework with further research using a new sample.

References

Aber, L., Slade, A., Berger, B., Bresgi, I., & Kaplan, M. (1985) The Parent Development Interview. Unpublished manuscript, Barnard College, Columbia University.

Bowlby, J. (1969/1982) Attachment and loss, Vol. 1: Attachment (2nd ed.) New York: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1973) Attachment and loss, Vol. 2: Separation. New York: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1980) Attachment and loss, Vol. 3: Loss. New York: Basic Books

Bretherton, I. (1985) Attachment theory: Retrospect and prospect. In I. Bretherton and E. Waters (eds.), Growing points in attachment theory and research. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, No. 209, 50, 3-40.

Epstein, S. (1980) The self-concept: A review and the proposal of an integrated theory of personality. In E. Straub (Ed.), Personality: Basic aspects and current research. (pp. 82-131). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Main, M., & Cassidy, J. (1988) Categories of response to reunion with the parent at age six: Predictable from infant attachment classifications and stable over a one-month period. Developmental Psychology, 24, 415-426.

Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1986) Discovery of an insecure-disorganized attachment pattern: Procedures, findings and theoretical implications. In T.B. Brazelton and M. Yogman (Eds.) Affective development in infancy. (pp. 95-124) New York: Academic Press.

Main, M., & Solomon, J. (in press) Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized/disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation. In M. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, and M. Cummings (Eds.) Attachment in the preschool years. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Solomon, J., George, C., & Ivins, B. (1987) Mother-child interaction in the home and security of attachment at age six. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore.

Correlations between Child Interactive Ratings and Maternal Secure Base

Interactive Scale

	Security	Avoidance	Ambivalence	Control
Secure Base	.82**	-.40*	-.22	-.39*
x=3.6				
s.d. 1.5				

*p <.05 **p <.01

Correlations between Child Interactive Ratings and Maternal Helplessness

	Interactive Scale			
	Security	Avoidance	Ambivalence	Control
Helplessness	-.44*	-.08	-.27	.66**
$\bar{x}$=3.6				
s.d. 1.4				

*p <.05 **p <.01